



In His Peace

Jonathan K. Dodson | John 20:19-23 | May 19, 2019

We've been looking at the end of each Gospel for Jesus's instructions for mission. Today, the final. The Gospel of John shows us: the Fear of Mission, Form of Mission, Power of Mission.

Fear in Mission

The men and women who followed Jesus all over Palestine, witnessed his powerful teaching, joined in on miraculous healings, now anxiously huddle in a locked room. With their Messiah dead they tremble. Will the Jewish leaders come for us next? They fear for their lives for following Jesus. We may not fear for our lives, but we do encounter fear in mission. Will I be able to answer a difficult question, will people think I'm weird and alienate me, will I lose my job? But one of the greatest fears people have about Jesus's mission is a fear shared by our whole society: *Who am I to tell others what they should believe?* It doesn't sound like a fear because it contains a valid concern. A concern to not assert authority over others, to reject any hint of superiority. "Who am I" *humbly* insists everybody be treated equally. Indeed, people of all races, genders, religious beliefs, and political views should be treated equally. But where the *valid concern* becomes a *fear* is not in the, who am I, but in "telling others what to believe." We live in an age of what philosopher Charles Taylor calls contested belief. Christian belief no longer holds sway and influence over our society. It is contestable. In our access to an almost infinite stream of information, people view Christianity as *one* item in the buffet of contestable beliefs. If you like it, great. If not, no big deal. Pick out what you like. *But society isn't actually this benign.* There are a lot of people telling us what to believe: New York Times, Fox News, Beto, Trump, Alissa Milano, and your friend's post. All this "belief telling" leads us to form what Alan Noble calls "**thin beliefs.**" Thin beliefs are beliefs we adopt without serious reflection, and as a result are easily dismissed. You might not have a strong opinion about something happening in Africa, but then your friend posts their disgust, and suddenly you're drawn in. You read their post and decide to like it and RT. Now, what motivated your response? Was it extensive research on this issue? A concern you've had for some time? Soul-searching? Or was it fear you'd come across *as not caring about a belief someone else cares about?* I'm tempted to like to give the impression I care *when I do.* Thin belief is driven by approval not

conviction. It's deep concern isn't the cause but being liked. You're not joining a rally, sacrificing your money, or going to Africa. It's thin belief. What happens to faith in Jesus when it's shuffled around with thin beliefs? Even though it's dense and deep, we're tempted to treat it as thin. To not speak out of conviction but for approval. We refuse to tell others what we believe, not because we're humble, but because we're fearful. Thin belief can also be present in the person who posts about Jesus, in 5 Bible studies, but doesn't have meaningful relationships with people outside their faith. They live for the approval of the religious group and remain detached from Jesus mission. How does Jesus address his disciple's fear? Notice he doesn't remove the threat of the Jews. Threats remain. Something we have to embrace to follow a crucified messiah. A cost we must count and recount. But he does address the fear. He does it *not outside-in but inside-out*. He doesn't call the disciples *outside* to take up arms against their oppressors; he appears *inside* the room to take on their fear. He doesn't remove the threat; he inhabits the fear. How? He says, **Peace be with you**. Literally, *Peace to you*. He doesn't "wish" peace *on them*; he issues peace *to them*. The Prince of Peace enters *the room*, shows his true colors, and they *rejoice!* Fear turns to joy. Why? Because something greater got on the inside of their fear, shattered their fears from the inside out. Like the scene in the Matrix when Neo is resurrected and runs and jumps into the Agent shattering him to a thousand pieces. Jesus wants to shatter your fears. But you've got to let him in before the fears are driven out. Jesus has to be closer than your fears. Let Jesus in so mission can flow out.

Form of Mission

The fear of mission, now the form, which gets at the valid concern we shouldn't tell others what to believe. What form should mission take? Jesus says, **As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you**" (21). *As the Father has sent me*. How was Jesus sent? In **love**, "**For God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him might not perish but have everlasting life**" (3:16). If God sent Jesus in love, that means we're sent in love (2 Cor 5:14). We tell others what to believe, not out of superiority but out of compassion. It's not that we're superior but Jesus is superior. It's not that our beliefs are better but our Savior is better. That's what he claimed, to be God and Savior, something no leader of any other major faith claimed and successfully got billions of people to believe.

That's what we're telling others; that Jesus is better, superior, worthy of trust and worship, not us. If the doorbell rings and you're delivered a certified letter to appear in court, the summons isn't because the messenger is superior but the summoner. We are sent as servants not as superiors, as couriers but not the Court. The summons comes from the Court of courts: *Believe in me and you'll have everlasting life, Resist me and you will perish*. It would be incredibly unloving to *not* deliver the message. The Father sends Jesus in love *and* in the **flesh**. He doesn't take out a Google Ad or drop an MP3 in our iTunes to reach us. He comes into our world, embracing all the inconvenience that comes with it. He eats with sinners, lays hands on the sick, comforts the sorrowful. He becomes a Jewish man, speaks Aramaic, and lives like a Galilean peasant. He inhabits human and cultural space. So we should inhabit the cultural space of those around us. We too should embrace the "inconvenience" of learning others' worldview, understanding their objections, sympathizing with their fears, and pointing them to the one who shatters fear with peace. How can you put flesh on the gospel? Several people in our church have taken up running with non-Christians friends. They join their cultural space, share Christ and life with them. Many volunteer with non-profits and inhabit the same spaces as orphan, the abandoned, the abused, and share the love of Christ with them. The Father has sent you to put flesh on the gospel, to articulate his love in cultural space. Are you on mission? As the Father sends me *so I send you*. When Jesus calls a person; he sends them as couriers of his love.

Power for Mission

Jesus addresses the fear of mission, the form of mission, and *power* of mission. What keeps his disciples going in the face of adversity? [And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit" \(22\)](#). What's happening? Commentators propose a lot of theories, but most miss the background text in Ezekiel 37. Ezekiel has a vision of a valley of dry bones. God commands him to prophesy to it. When he does, the bones begin to rattle, connect with sinew and flesh, reassemble before him. Then God tells Ezekiel to breathe on the bones: ["Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live \(37:9\)](#). Ezekiel speaks and the Spirit animates the bodies; Jesus breathes the Spirit and he recreates his disciples. Jesus has died and risen so *new life could be blown into their chest...and into ours: Whoever believes in me will not perish*

but have everlasting life. Jesus saves by his Spirit. It's not our breath that's effective; it's his breath. In the words of Leslie Newbigin, "the Spirit is the first and only effectual witness to Christ." The Spirit, not the disciples, raises Jesus from the dead. The Spirit, not the Church, is the *only effective* witness to Christ. We are ineffective, but the Spirit is effective. We testify; he transforms. We witness; he woos. The Spirit enters souls to assemble a new humanity. But, they must hear of forgiveness of sin through Jesus Christ, *If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld*" (23). This is easily misinterpreted, and in fact entire Christian traditions get this wrong, insisting confession to priests the only way to experience absolution. But the NT never depicts men/the disciples as priests who absolve others. In fact, the verbs of forgive and retain are in the passive, which means something behind them is doing the forgiving and retaining. What's that? Luther says when the gospel is proclaimed to sinners, it is as if Christ himself stands in our midst to issue forgiveness. We are not authoritative; he is authoritative. We are not effective; the Spirit is effective. Our words don't have life; his words have life. Will you let Jesus in so mission can flow out? Will you go in the confidence of the Effective Witness? Will you exchange thin belief for the enduring love of God in Christ?